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REAGAN AND THE RUSSIANS

By ROBERT MOSS

THE Reagan landslide in the United States has posed an acute dilemma for the Soviet leadership: how far should they go to take advantage of the lame-duck period of the Carter Administration before the new President is inaugurated on Jan. 20.

Arkadiy Shevchenko, the leading Soviet defector, and a former senior official at the United Nations with whom I spent part of election night in Washington, makes one disturbing prediction.

He believes that the Russians, no longer inhibited by the American elections, are likely to invade Poland in the near future.

By challenging the Communist party's monopoly control of social and political institutions, Poland's independent trade union leaders have posed a threat to the ruling system that is perceived in Moscow as a challenge to the internal security of the entire Soviet bloc.

Mr Shevchenko's analysis is supported by that of senior officials in France and Britain.

Yet the price of a Soviet invasion of Poland is likely to be vastly greater than that of intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Though Mr Kania, the present Polish leader and a former State security officer who is said by Western intelligence experts to have worked closely with the KGB, would probably be prepared to provide a pseudo-legal pretext for a Soviet invasion by requesting "fraternal assistance," the Polish people—as they have shown in the past—would mount a heroic resistance.

Sweeping sanctions

International protest would range from sympathy Masses in the Vatican and mass demonstrations by Polish-Americans in Chicago to attempts to impose more sweeping economic sanctions against the Soviet Union than have been applied in the past.

President Carter would almost certainly call in Mr Reagan in order to present a united face to the Russians.

Worst of all, from the Soviet viewpoint, a move into Poland in the coming months would be widely felt to justify the demands by Mr Reagan and his advisers for urgent rearmament, broadening still further the vast constituency he is now seen to command in America and encouraging the new Congress—in which the Senate will be under Republican control—to vote dramatic increases in the defence budget.

These are all reasons why some members of the Soviet Politburo may still hope that events in Poland can be contained by methods short of armed occupation until after Jan 20.

Part of that calculation may be that an invasion of Poland, or a similarly provocative move, after the Reagan inauguration might serve to demonstrate that, despite the campaign talk, the new President would be no more capable than the previous one of vetoing Soviet actions.

For the moment, the Russians are seeking to take the measure of Mr Reagan's entourage as much as possible. As early as last spring, senior officials at the Soviet Embassy were cultivating some of Mr Reagan's top foreign policy aides.

Now the veteran ambassador, Anatoli Dobrynin, and Mr Pavel Bessmertnyk, his Minister-Counsellor, the high-ranking KGB officer responsible for opening "back channels" to the American leadership, will have their work cut out.

Cubans' move

The Cubans, significantly, are also putting out lines to the Reagan camp.

President Castro is well aware that the period when he was allowed almost a free hand to make revolutionary forays into Central America and Africa is over.

The tough talk coming from Mr Reagan's Latin American advisers, notably Prof. James Theberge and Dr Roger Fontaine, on measures that should be taken to "contain" Cuba must have prompted

American administration provide renewed exile groups seeking throw of the Cast and may consider an economic block

Informed sources in community in Miami that Dr Castro is circumvent this signalling to the R that he may be loosen his ties and reduce his guerrilla groups

America in return for the opening up of normal diplomatic and economic relations.

The extent to which Dr Castro is able to make any independent overture to the Reagan administration, given his country's economic bondage to the Russians, the role of Soviet advisers (and KGB agents) in Havana, and the presence on his island of a Soviet "combat brigade" that may be used for internal security purposes is debatable.

Stick and carrot

But he will be offering Mr Reagan a stick as well as a carrot: the threat that the dumping of refugees of dubious backgrounds into South Florida this year could be repeated and that the contacts that Cuba has long nourished with militant groups among the black and Hispanic minorities in the United States and Puerto Rico could be used to trigger race riots.

If there should be a chance for a separate deal with Cuba, it may well be that (as in the case of Nixon and China) a conservative American administration will be in a better position than a liberal one to exploit it though secret bilateral contacts.

On a broader front, the management of America's dealings with Moscow will now be moved from a group of advisers (some of them associated with the radical Washington think-tank, the Institute for Policy Studies) who were usually willing to believe the best about the Soviet leadership to a new team of experts who have been notably more accurate in their predictions.

Leading contenders for the critical jobs of National Security Counsellor and Director of Central Intelligence are (respectively):

Prof. Richard Pipes, one of America's leading Sovietologists and a key figure on the so-called "Team-B" that put right the CIA's gross underestimates of Soviet military spending and capabilities in

of Security Advisor is Richard Allen.

Senate's backing

The consensus among Intelligence professionals in Washington is that the CIA can only be successfully reorganised—at last—with the support of a sympathetic Senate.

One of the many minefields ahead involves Soviet undercover activities in the United States.

A major security council scandal was brewing up in Washington in the last months before the elections, involving more senior figures than Mr David Barnett, the former CIA officer who was exposed as a Soviet mole.

There have been charges that the Carter administration has sought to inhibit FBI investigations of cases like the possible betrayal of an American agent in Moscow by a source close to the White House.

After Jan. 20, when the administration will be headed by Mr Reagan and the Senate Intelligence and judiciary committees by two prominent Conservatives, Senators Barry Goldwater and Strom Thurmond, the extent of Soviet penetration of American institutions is likely to be subjected to exhaustive review.